



South Central District Health

Keeping your family & community healthy
1020 Washington Street North * Twin Falls, ID 83301
208-737-5900

July 28, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts: Cheryle Becker, RN, Epidemiologist, 737-5936
Tom Machala, MPH, RN, Communicable Disease and Prevention Director, 737-5963
Karin Frodin, RN, Epidemiologist, 737-5974

Cases of West Nile Virus and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever **Prompt Summer Time Outdoor Disease Precautions**

South Central District Health has received reports of three people hospitalized with West Nile virus (WNV) in the past week. Two cases in Gooding County include a male youth between the ages of 10 and 20 and a woman in her 80s, and one case from Lincoln County involves a woman in her 70s. Additionally, the youth has been hospitalized with what appears to be Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

SCDH wants to remind everyone to take appropriate precautions to avoid these types of illness while outdoors. WNV is now believed to be present throughout the Magic Valley, so people should pay attention to avoiding mosquito bites whether at home or in outdoor activities.

Ticks carry Rocky Mounted Spotted Fever and appear to be especially prevalent this year around waterways, high grass, and brush. It is important to check for ticks on your body and clothing after visiting these areas.

Hantavirus transmitted by field mice droppings and urine infected dust is also a concern, especially in enclosed areas or prolonged campsites. Recently, a Cassia county man was hospitalized with Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome.

Encounters with bats also seem to be more prevalent in summertime as people visit deserted buildings and keep their windows open. Any close encounter with a bat results in an immediate recommendation for treatment against rabies, a 100% lethal illness once symptoms begin. Avoiding contact with bats is the best defense.

West Nile Virus

West Nile virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and has spread across all of the US over the past three years. Last year, signs of WNV were found in Gooding, Twin Falls, and Jerome counties, but mosquitoes in all areas of Idaho should be assumed to be carrying the virus this year. Most human infections of West

Nile virus are mild or have no symptoms. Approximately 20 percent of those infected develop a generally mild fever that lasts from 3 to 6 days and begins from 3 to 14 days after infection. Symptoms often include: fever and headache, muscle aches, tiredness, nausea and vomiting, eye pain, skin rash, and enlarged lymph nodes. Less than one percent of people infected develop serious neurological disease. Those over age 50 are more susceptible to serious complications from the virus. People are encouraged to consult their health care provider if they have concerns about their health. Although there is no treatment against the virus, supportive therapy and treatment of symptoms is usually followed until the patient recovers. Blood tests are available for those with symptoms, but two samples three weeks apart are needed for confirmation of West Nile virus.

Follow these guidelines to decrease your risk of WNV infection:

- When you are outdoors, use insect repellent containing an EPA-registered active ingredient, usually DEET. For young children, DEET should be avoided or used sparingly. Follow the directions on the package.
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times or consider staying indoors during these hours.
- Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets, and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they are not being used.
- Vaccines are available for horses. Check with your veterinarian. No vaccines are available to prevent human infections.

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) is a severe and potentially fatal disease spread by ticks. Although first recognized in the Rocky Mountain states, RMSF is found in practically all states in the United States. RMSF is caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii*, which is carried by the American dog tick and the Rocky Mountain wood tick. When an infected tick bites a human, the disease is transmitted through the skin into the bloodstream. Usually, the first symptom of RMSF is a sudden high fever that may occur within 1-14 days after a tick bite. Other symptoms may include: nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, lack of appetite, and severe headache, plus a characteristic full body rash including the palms of the hands and bottom of the feet.

RMSF can be difficult to diagnose because it resembles other diseases. Blood tests may be done to confirm the diagnosis, but treatment should be started as soon as possible. The antibiotics most commonly used for treatment are doxycycline and tetracycline.

Prevention

The best way to prevent RMSF is to limit your exposure to ticks. If you live in or visit an area that is prone to ticks, take the following precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks are more visible.
- Tuck pant legs inside socks so ticks cannot crawl up your legs.
- Apply insect repellants containing DEET (applied to exposed skin) or permethrin (applied to clothing).
- For young children, DEET should be avoided or used sparingly. Carefully follow the directions on the label.
- Carefully check your entire body for ticks after returning from outdoor areas.
- Check pets for ticks.

Hantavirus

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a deadly disease transmitted by infected rodents through urine, droppings, or saliva. Humans can contract the disease when they breathe in aerosolized virus, usually while cleaning dusty contaminated areas. Although rare, HPS is potentially deadly. Initial symptoms of Hantavirus infection included high fever, headache, malaise, cough, abdominal or lower back pain, nausea and vomiting. These symptoms are abruptly followed by respiratory distress and low blood pressure. Again, there is no treatment against the infecting virus, so supportive therapy is used to treat symptoms. Hospitalization and intensive treatment is usually required. Rodent control in and around the home remains the primary strategy for preventing Hantavirus infection. The following are general methods of prevention:

- Seal up holes inside and outside the home to prevent entry by rodents.
- Trap rodents around the home to help reduce the population.
- Clean up rodent nests, urine and droppings, and dispose of dead rodents.
- Clean up rodent food sources and nesting sites.
- Care should be taken to not inhale the dust in infected areas while cleaning.

Additional information regarding Hantavirus is also available on the CDC website, www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps/index.htm

###